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To: Department of State

From: London, No. 780 FEBR[illegible] 15, 1950

Subject: Referendum on the Question of King Leopold's Return to Belgium.

As pointed out in the Embassy's despatch no. 758 of February 14, 1950, the views expressed in a Times (Independent, Conservative) leading article of February 11, 1950, are very close to those held by Foreign Office officials.

The Head of the Western Department recently commented on the subject that M. Spaak was undoubtedly right in his belief that a campaign and popular vote on the question of the return of King Leopold would do damage which it would be difficult to repair. As in the Times article, the difficulty of having Prince Baudouin succeed to the throne if his father were not vindicated by a substantial majority in the referendum was also mentioned.

In the course of a recent informal after dinner conversation Mr. John Russell, Assistant Head of the Western Department, categorically refuted a statement made by a Belgian businessman to the effect that the British and American Governments would prevent the return of King Leopold should the plebiscite go in his favor. Mr. Russell said that on the contrary, the British Government was leaning over backwards to avoid influencing the result one way or the other. Mr. Russell's statements undoubtedly represent the official views of the British Government, and to date there is no evidence that the British Labor Party is giving any aid or comfort to the Belgian Socialist Party in its vigorous campaign to prevent the return of King Leopold. The Secretary of Embassy present at the above conversation likewise indicated that the American Government regarded the return of the King of the Belgians as a purely domestic question for the Belgians themselves to settle. Under the circumstances the American Government would be very careful not to intervene, it was added.

755.11/2-1550

Frances E. Willis
Frances E. Willis
First Secretary of Embassy

FEWillis:mcm
February 15, 1950
Copy for American Embassy, Brussels

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